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Performing pasts for present purposes: re-enactment as embodied, performative history

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"History – the past transformed into words or paint or dance, or play – is always a performance."

(Greg Dening "Performing on the Beaches of the Mind" 1)

"Performing history… [connects] the past with the present through the creativity of theatre, constantly quoting from the past, but erasing the exact traces in order to gain full meaning in the present."

(Freddie Rokem *Performing History* xiii)

Bridging the gap: forging connections between history, performance and the surrounding fields

As both an historian and a performance studies scholar, my theoretical leanings reflect a merging of two disciplines, developed in response to an avid interest in sometimes competing yet often complementary facets of both. Most intriguing to me is the *gap between* these two fields, a fertile ground rich with possibilities, dotted with wilderness yet to be fully explored. This liminal landscape, perched between two neighbouring but at times opposing fields, appears inherently bilateral, occupied by the past and the present, the traditional and the avant-garde, the archive and the repertoire. But what of the messy grey patches in between? Aging fences constructed around disciplinary territories are being eroded by recent turns in scholarship, allowing tentative, but rapidly expanding strands of connection to emerge. If further attended, these seeds of academic inquiry could form a flourishing thoroughfare, allowing us to better elucidate the interconnected relationships between temporality, embodiment, culture, performance and history, and the ways through which we know them.

This chapter strides, skips and stumbles in just such a direction through a focus on historical re-enactment – the (re)performance of a historical event, person, culture or activity. An extremely popular pastime, performance mode and in some respects a form of public pedagogy, re-enactment is emerging in scholarship as a potentially productive (albeit somewhat problematic) means of rousing interest in history and, according to writers such as Vanessa Agnew, a reflection of a broader affective turn in historiography (299-300). There is considerable research on the performing of history in film, theatre, dance and performance art, as well as in the rituals of many Indigenous communities, but until very recently, few

scholars engaged with the other within our midst – the devoted medievalists, Celtic celebrators and war buffs known as recreational re-enactors.

Inviting historiography, film and theatre into one dressing room was sure to create tension between the different conventions being employed (and at times, desecrated) in re-enactment. Correspondingly, the reviews so far have been rather mixed. Greg Dening – an historian praised for theorising the theatrical underpinnings of history – has somewhat ironically charged re-enactment, for example, with "hallucinat[ing] the past as merely the present in funny dress." (Dening *Mr Bligh's Bad Language* 4). The potential of certain forms of re-enactment as a broader historical tool, however, is by no means unrecognised or novel. In his renowned lectures on historiography published in 1946, R.G. Collingwood argued that the task of the historian is to re-enact the past in one's mind. Even Dening admits that "for all my queasiness at grand historical re-enactment, I have my own re-enactments, of course" (5). Examining how we record (and construct) histories *on the page*, how we perform and connect to history *mentally*, has been a welcomed and bountiful scholarly pursuit. Dancing with Dening's concept of history as performative[1] – in its unfolding, in its records, in its writing – Diana Taylor asserts the importance of what she refers to as the *repertoire* – history more literally in and as performance, performance as an alternate (or complementary) form of archive (16-26). Following Taylor, I perceive the archive and the repertoire not as polar opposites, but rather as two intricate, mutually influencing parts of a whole, which together enhance our comprehension of history. As Joseph Roach states, "the pursuit of performance does not require historians to abandon the archive, but it does encourage them to spend more time in the streets." (xii). Similar notions have been voiced by public and ethnohistorians, perhaps most notably by Natalie Zimmer Davis, Inga Clendennin, Paul Pickering and Stephen Gapps, who encourage us to complement archival study with ethnographic and, to varying degrees, performative and imaginative methodologies.

Such developments, coupled with the phenomenological understanding of the inherent connection between mind and body – and the increasingly recognised significance of the latter – facilitate consideration of how people attempt to re-enact history through, with and in their bodies, how people interact *kinaesthetically* and *performatively* with the past. Particular embodied and performance based practices have been demonstrated to function as a form of social memory and historical re/connection through a living (or relived) tradition by, amongst others, Paul Connerton, Freddie Rokem, Rebecca Schneider, Taylor and Roach. This chapter continues their exploration with a slight shift in direction, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork to engage with the pedagogic possibilities of what I term recreational, romanticised re-

enactment, considering how we might conceptualise the practice as a playful, public mode of historical inquiry. In doing so, I consider the potential of reenactment "as a source and as a method", in chorus with Paul Pickering that "despite its obvious pitfalls and dangers, there is much that a careful historian can learn about context, about material conditions, about possibility, from reenactment as a methodology." (126-127).What effect can learning and participating in activities from a past culture – eating foods they ate, dancing steps they danced, jousting like they jousted – have on our connection to and understanding of the past? Can these activities bring us closer to those bodies that no longer act, and if so, how and to what significance?

A broad and varying umbrella term, 're-enactment' is paraded about with different meanings in different spheres. Broadly speaking, there are four main forms of historical re-enactment: theatre re-enactment, performance art re-enactment, filmic re-enactment, and what is often referred to as 'living history'. Within each there are numerous sub-genres, some of which are more widely acknowledged in academia than others. 'Theatrical re-enactment' (more commonly referred to as 'performance reconstruction' or 'original practice performance') pertains to the restaging of plays and other forms of theatre, with a focus on recreating a portrayal as close as possible to the so called original.[2] Performance art re-enactments can mirror this approach, but more often play with or critique the event or performance in question, reinterpreting the past or commenting on the present or future. Filmic re-enactments range from historical documentaries with scenes re-enacting key practices or events, to reality historical television (think *The Ship* and *The 1900 House*), to movies that claim to portray a more historically grounded depiction.

The fourth type of re-enactment – living history – has been defined by folklore historian Jay Anderson as "an attempt by people to simulate life in another time." (291). It is prudent to differentiate between what I perceive as two distinct, although at times overlapping sub-genres, which in themselves have many variations. The more socially accessible and integrated form is the large scale, public re-enactments that are generally commercially or state driven and are usually site-specific works performed *for* an audience. Recreations of villages and historically themed museums that use re-enactment (the line between the two is often blurred) also fall into this category. The Plymouth Plantation in the United States is perhaps the most famous example of this form of living history and has certainly received the most academic attention.[3]

'Recreational re-enactment' is a term used by some re-enactors to describe another form of living history – the performances and performative activities of unofficial historical societies. These re-enactments serve as both a form of public pedagogy and a hobby for its members. Recreational re-enactments tend to be performed by and for their participants, rather than for an outside audience. While there are numerous styles within this genre, with varying attitudes towards accuracy, military re-enactments seem to have sparked the most academic interest, particularly of the American civil war.[4] There is a tendency in the field of living history to demarcate between so called serious forms of re-enactment (generally representing a specific, historically significant event) and the (re)creation of romanticised historical cultures and pursuits, such as by the Society for Creative Anachronism. The latter form of re-enactment has generally either been ignored or criticised by academics and serious re-enactors alike, due to a perceived lack of attention to 'historical accuracy' or, to use the other term frequently cited by living historians, 'authenticity'. Questioning this perspective, I suggest that re-enactors practicing what I term 'romantic re-enactment' choose to privilege atmosphere and experience over a strict adherence to accuracy, utilising a carnivalesque, performative and bodily approach to history, inverting and parodying dominant perspectives (of medieval times and historiography itself) through humour and chaos. In so doing, I consider the possibility that these activities can embody a visceral, ephemeral and sensual way of knowing the past.

This notion is perhaps best understood in terms of Diana Taylor's conception of performance as an *episteme*, which posits performance as both a subject of analysis, and a lens through which to analyse (xvi). Applying this concept to re-enactment, performing past cultures (by which I mean both the physical performing of historical activities with our bodies, *and* the theatrical performativity created for and with such doings) may be perceived as a way of examining and perhaps connecting with the past. To illustrate this idea, let us turn towards the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted when researching the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA).

Re/playing the Middle Ages 'as they should have been' – the Society for Creative Anachronism

Sunday July 19, 2009

It may be the middle of winter, but it certainly does not feel like it. Driving around the busy backstreets of a business district in Sydney, I find myself bemoaning the lack of air-conditioning as I search for sight or

sound of anything resembling medieval maidens or noble knights. I have been anticipating this day with a mixture of interest and apprehension, wondering what I will find at this medieval fair otherwise known as 'Winterfest'. Now, however, my thoughts are on how handy a GPS would be and wondering why on earth I wore long sleeves and jeans!

Having finally found the park, I trawl the packed streets until I manage to squeeze into a car space several blocks away. I arrive somewhat breathless at the gate, where two cheery "peasants" wearing coarse brown tunics, woolen tights and broad grins, greet me enthusiastically. One of the fellows (who, it must be said, looks more like Friar Tuck than Robin Hood) requests coin for my entry, then waives me through with a smile.

Before I can see the carousers I can hear them: the drum of hoof beats, the clash of swords, the gasps and cheers of the crowd. I hurry past the obscuring forest (or rather the patches of dry, scraggly Australian bush) but, alas, the joust ends just as I arrive. Left to browse the merchants' stalls until the next round begins, I inspect wares ranging from (unsharpened) swords and (lightweight) armour, to leather bound books and Celtic inspired jewellery.

Noticing with relief that the traditional Scottish tucker stall offers a vegetarian version of haggis, I amble over to the kilted cooks, focusing on the txt message I am writing. Jolted by a neigh startling close by, I glance up to find a rather striking figure bedecked in full armor, astride a truly resplendent horse adorned with livery. They are so close that I can feel the stead's warm breath on my face. The sudden, somewhat surreal shift of vision from a mobile phone to the living, breathing display of knighthood before me causes my own breath to (quite literally) catch in my throat. One more step, I chuckle with a mixture of amusement and incredulity, and I would have collided with a knight in shining armour!

My knight in shining armour – jousters at Winterfest 2010, Sydney, Australia

'Winterfest' – a Medieval themed, two day winter festival held in Sydney, Australia – was my first experience of historical recreational re-enactment. I attended this event as part of an ethnographic project on the (sub)culture of the Scadians (as members of the Society for Creative Anachronism amusingly call themselves). The SCA is the largest Medieval and Renaissance recreational re-enactment society in the world, with clubs throughout the Americas, Europe, the U.K. and the Australasian region. On the Australian homepage, the SCA describe themselves as:

> an international non-profit educational organisation that is dedicated to the research and recreation of pre-17th century European History, with a particular focus on its practical applications in arts and sciences, including costuming, cooking, martial arts, dance, calligraphy and illumination, metalwork, archery and music (to name but a few!)

The society has a clearly defined, respected hierarchy loosely modeled after the medieval feudal system. In the SCA, the 'known world' is divided into kingdoms, each of which is ruled by a king and queen, underneath whom are barons and baronesses who rule states or large regions. There are also seneschals, marshals and heralds, amongst other roles and titles. While these positions are largely ceremonial, they do carry some duties such as announcing of news and protecting SCA royalty in battle. While not all people hold a formal state of office, everyone has a medieval name (first and surname), for which they must provide documentation of historical authenticity. All names are registered with the society so that no two people can carry the same medieval name and, at least at society events, these adopted names largely replace their real ones. Many people also have a developed persona. Medieval dress, known as 'garb', is not only expected, but usually required, as my then partner, who valiantly accompanied me to a Scadian feast, discovered to his great dismay. Each region holds weekly local events (combat training, arts and science nights) and regular feasts and battles. The society also organises national and sometimes international events, boasting hundreds of people in attendance.[5]

Winterfest is a collaborative effort between the SCA and several other medieval re-enactment societies. The day I attended was particularly warm for winter, even by Australian standards – an irony that I am sure was not lost on the armored participants. While the dryness of the Australian landscape is far removed from the beautiful lush forests of Britain, the outdoor setting, grassy grounds and surrounding trees were less disparate from what one might envisage for a medieval set than any local building (all of which were built in the twentieth or twenty first centuries) would have been. This natural, open air stage was juxtaposed by the long lines of cars crammed into the car spots along the road and the

proximity of major commercial and office buildings. The choice of place was both fitting and ironic, in keeping with the theme of creative anachronism the SCA embraces.

The structure of space was intrinsic to the experience of the festival. The societies' camps and the merchants' stalls were arranged in a large oval loosely enclosing the utilised area. The camps and stalls faced inwards to the tourney ring and jousting lanes, which were positioned in the centre. This layout had the effect of focusing attention on the central performance space, while also creating a barrier between the outside 'mundane world' (as Scadians call everyday life) and the evocation of medievalism within. From a commercial perspective, it also meant that after watching a battle or joust, visitors were surrounded with the wares of the various vendors and the camps of the societies recruiting new members.

Wood carving and armor displays

Sword fighting in the tourney ring

While perhaps not strictly accurate representations of medieval sword fighting and jousting (although the techniques are derived, I am told, from well researched manuals) the demonstrations were nevertheless rather affective. The hand-to-hand combat took place in a simple arena much like a boxing ring, formed only with a few well-placed metal poles and lengths of rope. A handful of colourful pennants were the only adornment, their brightness creating an appropriate air of festivity. The simplicity of the performance space focused attention on the fighters in their metal helms, belted tunics, tights and boots, wielding swords and wooden shields painted with their chosen coat of arms. The costumes (which, we were informed, were historically accurate[6]) contributed to the *performativity* of the action, reminding us to suspend disbelief, to forget who these men were outside the performance and to engage in the (re)creation of a medieval tourney before us.

While the experience of these fighters was in one way very individual, it was also very communal. The crowd participated in the action through their spirited response – avid gazes and tense muscles evidence of the way the re-enactors' exertions were drawing them into the performance. I heard the cheers, boos and gasps, I saw the hearty claps, the shaking fists, the dozens of people jostling to see the action, moving closer and closer to the ring and the bodies clashing within it. At several points, the "guard" (a man dressed in brightly coloured, puffed out garb more reminiscent of a jester than a knight, who also doubled as the

M.C.) had to push people back from the ring, yelling out friendly but firm commands to stay back. At times, I felt outside of the excitement, my endeavour to observe and record leaving me within yet separate from the collective. At other times, I felt myself swept up into it, I heard myself cheering, felt my neck craning for a better look, my hands thudding together in applause, unconsciously responding to the energy around me. In anthropologist Victor Turner's language, there was a certain *liminality* in this experience, somewhere between the *liminal* experience of ritual, and the *liminoid* experience of performance, for this battle was both real and performed, ritual and theatre. Anthropologist Lowell Lewis asserts that "some games become ritualized over time" and I believe such is the case with these tourneys (50). Engaged in the in-the-moment(ness) of the battle, we were "betwixt and between" and this shared liminoid experience evoked something of a fleeting *communitas* – that crucial product of liminality – moments when the crowd responded as a whole, wincing at a nasty looking blow, booing at a foul play, or cheering the mighty comeback of an underdog. Engaged with the action, and demonstrative in our (re)actions, we became a part of the (re)creation, unwittingly (or purposefully) playing the part of rowdy medieval audience.

The Three P's of re-enactment: participation, performance and play

One of the elements of medieval re-enactment that render it so problematic for many historians is the romanticised, myth-heavy approach of its participants. And yet, are myths not an intrinsic part of both culture and history? Anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup asserts that "myth and history are equally true renderings of the past; they differ mainly in their being two distinct modes of representation." (*A Passage to Anthropology* 139). I would suggest that these two forms are actually concomitant; that history and myth work together simultaneously and inextricably to represent the past, with the balance between the two varying depending on the research claim. While most historical accounts are founded on archival evidence, many still feature at least a small degree of myth. By comparison, recreational re-enactment of the kind this paper discusses is more myth based, pursuing atmosphere over accuracy, but does this necessitate a demarcation from history? As Hastrup argues: "myth is an allegorical representation of the past, whereas history is perceived as literal … We have repressed the knowledge that metaphors induce action and thus *are* history" (139). Romanticised re-enactment, as a playful, performative approach to history, is metaphorical rather than literal in nature; an imaginative evocation rather than a claimed imitation of the past. While such pursuits seem a far throw from scholarly or educative

epistemologies, forms of imaginative engagement in the historiographical process have been championed by respected historians such as the aforementioned Dening, Davis and Clendennin. When giving reign to our imaginations, however, it would seem that the boundaries of a critically inflected, historiographically academic play pen are necessary for the history to be considered "real".[7] Imaginative play as a cognitive function is, I believe, an intrinsic element of the SCA's method of representing the past. The physicality of the tourney I attended created a vivid experience which engaged my senses, while the performativity of the event encouraged me to accept the make-believe of the game, through the theatrical suspension of disbelief. In many respects, Scadians subordinate accuracy in preference for a more imaginative *atmosphere of authenticity*, an affective engagement with a self-confessed idealised and metaphoric medievalism, or, as they express it "the Middle ages as they should have been." This reflects a broader sub-culture of medievalism that, as Michael Alexander argues, has many forms, but is frequently characterised by varying degrees of romanticism and nostalgia (xxii).

Watching the demonstrations at Winterfest, observing the intensity, effort and sheer enjoyment of the fighters, I reflected on the infamously problematic but potentially productive claim of re-enactment: a somatic connection with the past. Dressed in reconstructed medieval armor, these men were fighting with full size and weighted replicas of medieval weapons. They had learnt the same bodily techniques as medieval warriors and were now moving with their bodies in much the same way as their medieval counterparts, a skilled mode of moving created for and with these recreated tools. I never felt that these men (or their audience) were in any way *in* the Middle Ages. Rather, I began to consider the possibility that they were bringing something of the Middle Ages forward, bringing a touch of 'then' into the now. Perhaps, as sociologist Paul Connerton asserts, "by consciously repeating the past an individual life gives the past presentness again." (63).

For Richard Schechner, performance is always 'twice behaved behaviour'; it is redoing past acts, re-saying past words, re-behaving past behaviours (38). According to this theory, re-enactment, as a form of twice behaved behaviour, can provide a way for re-enactors to "rebecome what they once were" or to "rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become" (38) – one would assume in an imaginative, performative and transient sense. Schechner's theory rests on a notion of a fluidity of self; an idea explored by Hastrup in relation to fieldwork in ethnography. Hastrup draws on James Clifford's assertion that identities are always relational and inventive to suggest that participant-observation in the ethnographic process can induce something likened to a possession, where

the line between self and other are blurred to create "a world of betweenness" ('Writing Ethnography: State of the Art' 118, 120). It seems, as Stephen Snow has also recognised, that re-enactors are using a method akin to ethnographic participant-observation in an effort to understand a past, rather than present, culture (116). Snow's framing of re-enactment as a form of ethnographically inflected method acting aligns with Freddie Rokem's argument that when performing history, actors become witnesses of a past resurrected in the present through the creative potentials of theatre (xii, 2). In a similar vein, Rebecca Schneider draws on Elizabeth Freeman's notion of "mutually disruptive energy" to suggest that reenactment is more than just a "simple negotiation" or "remembrance" of the past, as the past is already partially there (14-15). The past materialises as a corpse recalled and reanimated in mimetic bodies of the present, a lingering presence "not entirely not alive" (12). In so doing, Rokem and Schneider question rigid demarcations between past and present, troubling linear notions of temporality and its relationship with performance.

At another SCA event I attended – a "medieval feast" held in a converted scout hall – the atmosphere and focus of the re-enactment was very different. Here, the emphasis was not on action, but rather dining, deportment and dress:

I walk through a rough wooden door frame to find the hall dimly lit, candles and lanterns scattered around the room. Gauze flows in graceful loops from the ceiling and vibrant banners with coat of arms sit proudly on the walls. The feasters, all dressed in medieval garb, lounge on large cushions around the room, chatting in quiet but jolly tones. Before we are allowed to join them, we are given friendly, but firm orders by the woman behind the sign in desk: "in the back room you will find plastic tubs – from there you may select more appropriate attire." After admiring an assortment of medieval style dresses, tunics, leggings and coats of various hues and materials, I convince my partner to at least don the crimson cape I hand him. Not wanting to appear brazen, I settle on a plain, but serviceable blue dress, as the only garment long enough to conceal my ankles. Getting into the dress turns out to be an experience in itself – there is so much fabric and it is quite stiff, not to mention the lack of zippers! Struggling with this mass of material, I find myself empathising with the custom amongst medieval ladies to have a maid to assist one's dressing; a practice I previously scoffed at. Suitably (re)dressed, I walk back into the hall. The gown hugs the base of my neck and stretches down the length of my limbs, rendering me conscious of how little of my skin is exposed to the air and light around me. Despite this, my legs feel unusually bare, unused to skirts fanning out from my body. My arms, in contrast, feel curiously restricted by the sleeves, designed (I am told by a fellow sufferer) to fit as tightly as possible, as was the fashion. Being a person who tends to talk with her hands and thus in need of unrestricted use of my arms, I feel keenly aware of the way this costume shapes and conforms

my movement. How different my body looks and feels in this dress than in the jeans and sleeveless, fitted top I wore here!

Living historians and re-enactors assert that authenticity is woven into the historical accuracy of objects – the garments, armour and various apparatuses they labour over. At times less accurate, but potentially more affective is the experience of authenticity sometimes felt during the corporeal, sensual *process* of (re)creating, wearing, harnessing or moving in/with these (re)creations. Is an embodied authenticity evoked by shaping your body with bodily techniques of a bygone era, literally altering your physicality over time through prolonged practice? Connerton discusses how fashions of particular periods are designed to accommodate or confine the movement and presentation of bodies as befits the customs and expectations of the culture (32-37). Enriching a Foucaldian conception of body as cultural construct with a phenomenological inflection, Connerton elucidates the interconnection between material, ideological and embodied culture. Recognising that the social value and expectation for particular customs and behaviours are interconnected with the demonstration of these customs and behaviours *through* our bodies, Connerton posits bodies as being "socially constituted in the sense that [they are] culturally shaped in [their] actual practices and behaviour." (84). Prefiguring Taylor's notion of the repertoire, Connerton frames bodies as vehicles for memory and remembrance, participating in and absorbing what he terms incorporating practices – embodied histories that resist and refute what would otherwise be the dominion of the written record. Connerton's theories highlight the potential significance (re)doing cultural, bodily practices could have for historical understanding. Following the phenomenological theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, if we experience the world with/in our bodies, and if our bodily presentation, movement and sensual experience of the world around us are influenced by the garments upon them (and the tools that we use), then perhaps donning the recreated garments and wielding the recreated tools of others may impart some bodily knowledge of their embodied experience. Adopting this perspective allows us to utilise notions of *embodiment* not to reduce or negate cultural experience, but rather to connect with it. Thus, in a very practical, very real and very bodily way, that reconstructed medieval dress gave me a (partial) physical sense of female bodies of the medieval past; of the way they were presented and how the style of their movement may have been influenced and framed by their clothing. The staging of contemporary space as medieval – the candles, banners and the presence of other bodies in medieval clothing – enhanced the experience, which was further augmented by eating medieval cuisine out of wooden bowls and utensils.

This re-enactment was a *sensory* way of being *then*, engaging our sense of touch, taste, sight and smell. Re-enactors augment this experience by learning to perform cultural and bodily practices of the past while wearing such garments, training their bodies in ways of moving and doing from another time. The re-enactors' feeling of connection with past bodies is thus, to appropriate Susan Foster, not a mystical thing, but rather, a very *bodily* thing (10).

We are all, as living, doing, experiencing bodies, shaped by and shaping bodily practices, and through this, cultural practices. In convergence with Connerton, Taylor asserts that "memory is embodied and sensual…conjured through the senses" (82). She perceives the specificities of our bodies as crucial to the way we engage in performance and cultural memory:

> The body in embodied cultural memory is specific, pivotal, and subject to change. Why this insistence on the body? Because it is impossible to think about cultural memory and identity as disembodied. The bodies participating in the transmission of knowledge and memory are themselves a product of certain taxonomic, disciplinary, and mnemonic systems (86).

If bodies are socially and culturally expressive, formed by, and forming culture and society, then re-enacting bodily practices may feasibly provide a link to the culture and society that created (and was, in part, created by) these practices. This approach is complemented by Joseph Roach's concept of the kinesthetic imagination, which he defines as "a way of thinking through movements – at once remembered and reinvented" (27). Roach argues that the kinesthetic imagination is a vehicle for the restoration of behavior, which, he believes, can facilitate a transmission of culture. In concert with Henri Corbin's notion of the *imaginal*, the kinesthetic imagination, according to Roach:

> inhabits the realm of the virtual. Its truth is the truth of simulation, of fantasy or of daydreams, but its effect on human action may have material consequences of the most tangible sort and of the widest scope. This faculty, which flourishes in the space where imagination and memory converge… consists in a high degree in performers (27).

The dances, crafts and combat techniques practiced by the SCA are based on both historical evidence and on playful experimentation, on *kinaesthetic imagination*. In this way, re-enactors might transmit something of the historical culture they re-enact, recreating aspects of the past through present bodies. Scholars often focus on re-enactors claims to intense moments of felt historical connection (civil war re-enactors describe this as 'wargasm'). What I am suggesting here, however, is an embodied empathy that is enhanced over time, through a layering of present bodies with the materials, movements and mannerisms of past bodies, a la Judith Butler's notion of 'sedimented acts' – the repeated, embodied enactments

that create gender (and, I would argue, other cultural identities) (523). This is not to say that Scadians transform present bodies into medieval ones; there seems to be few even amongst the most zealous of re-enactors that would make such a claim. Rather, I'm suggesting that re-enactors create something of "an affiliation, based on a kind of kinesthetic empathy between living and dead but imagined bodies" (Foster 7). While Foster refers to the historian bent over books in the archive, re/writing history, a connection with bodies of the past, with the people who participated in the same pursuits so many years ago, may be similarly elicited by physically re-enacting these activities. There is, according to a phenomenological understanding of perception, a "common understanding of being, formulated through anatomical similarity between subjects, realized within a shared world." (Card 139). But, as Card elucidates, these insights are gleaned not only through what we recognise, but also what is *unrecognisable* (140). The impossibility of ever completely recreating an experience is frequently cited as an inadequacy of re-enactment as a form of public historiography. Schneider, however, questions the belief that authenticity is undermined by difference, offering a metaphor of re-enactment as 'misquote' – as not the event, but something akin to it – to understand the practice not as wrong, but rather 'live', an embrace of the fluid 'againness' of performance. If, as Schneider and Card argue, something authentic may be found in the disparity between the (re)performance and its source, then empathy can be created through the incongruences as well as the convergences between bodies and cultures. A comparative analysis, always tacking back and forth – between where bodies and cultures align and where they differ, what works and what fails, what we can relate to, and what we cannot – can develop insight into both past and present.

It's just a jump to the left: time warp or warping time?

These claims precipitate significant historiographical and ethical issues that need to be recognised. My experience of wearing and moving in that blue dress as a young, female university student in the twenty-first century in Australia's warm climate diverges significantly from the various experiences of women in a British climate in the twelfth to fourteen centuries. Experiences, while often communal in nature, are also individual, contextual and specific. The ethical implications of representing the past without any real accountability need to be considered. Is the attempt to performatively (re)create a historical culture a means of facilitating engagement with often overlooked aspects of history, such as the so called domestic pursuits of cooking and sewing? Or is it a form of invasion and theft,

the way ethnographies of contemporary cultures are often theorised to be? The style of re-enactment practiced by the SCA seldom signposts what is and is not authentic and nostalgia inevitably colours the history being (re)created. Svetlana Boym points towards the consequences nostalgia carries for historical representation, the danger of it becoming "an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure." (xiv). These issues, however, are not specific to re-enactment; written history is fraught with many of the same issues, as well as issues of its own. As in all methodologies, the limitations and problematic aspects of re-enactment need to be wrestled with. And yet, while my experience through my body will never be quite the same as a medieval woman's experience through her body, this style of re-enactment does seem to evoke an embodied, experiental *relation* to those past bodies, utilising bodily experience as a unique way of knowing.

Why is it that so many people attain their knowledge of history through documentaries and even movies rather than history books? No doubt there are many reasons, one of which is that we understand and connect with things when we can relate to them. Despite the complexity of our thoughts and our ability to read, humans are *sensory* beings. Hence, we often connect more with something we can see and hear because it makes the experience more real for us by bringing it closer to our own. Re-enactors heighten this by engaging *all* of the senses – they read, they discuss, but they also extend their experience into taste, smell, sound and touch. But they go one very significant step further – they make the transition from passive, *feeling* body, to active, *doing,* body. It is through and with their 'doing bodies' that re-enactors connect with medieval culture. But it is not *just* through 'doing' that a re-enactor's feeling of connection with the past is invigorated. It is also the playful *performativity* of this doing, the ability to make-believe as we do so unproblematically in theatre. Experiential (re)doing – and the inherent *performativity* therein – has the potential to reanimate bodies of the past, recreating an historical culture for bodies of the present.

This connection with the past, and the unique way of knowing it provides, derives from a form of fieldwork so very applicable to history because of the 'doing' and *performativity* they both share. Ethnographers observe and participate in daily activities and cultural rituals in order to relate to/with foreign cultures, in an effort to develop a closer, deeper knowledge of "the other". They will never be able to do or experience these pursuits in quite the same way as the "natives" do, but through participation and observation they can go some way towards bridging the gap. By engaging in activities of a past culture, re-

enacting evokes a relation to bodily experiences of past peoples, bringing their cultures a little closer to us by moving our bodies a little closer to theirs.

[1] Please note – the term 'performative' has been used in very particular and different ways, most notably by Judith Butler in relation to gender. I use 'performative' and 'performativity' in an effort to communicate the dual meaning of performance in re-enactment – the physical performance of bodily pursuits, as well as the theatricality of many of these doings. The embodied and theatrical dimensions of the performativity of re-enactment are, I feel, inherently intertwined.

[2] See, for example Carson and Karim-Cooper; Robert K. Sarlos.

[3] See, for example, Scott Magelssen; Rebecca Schechner; Stephen Snow.

[4] See, for example Vanessa Agnew, Dennis Hall, Rebecca Schneider.

[5] For more information on the SCA, see Sylvia Sparkis 'Objects and the Dream: Material Culture in the Society For Creative Anachronism', which offers what may well be the only other published academic work on the society.

[6] One might question, however, how this particular re-enactor, who was from another medieval group, defines 'historically accurate', as the measure of this is a point of variance and some contention in the field. Re-enactors are often divided into three categories, dependent on their level of authenticity; farbs, mainstreamers and progressives or 'hard-core authentics'. 'Authenticity' is measured amongst re-enactors by the level of adherence to historically "correct" details, particularly in costumes and weaponry. The use of anachronistic materials or tools is considered 'inauthentic' and thus 'farby'.

[7] As vigorously demonstrated by the recent argument between Clendennin and historical fiction writer, Kate Granville. See Clendinnen 16; Grenville and Koval.